

**Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Liahona Academy
P.O. Box 790310
Virgin, Utah 84779**

April 20, 2005



Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Liahona Academy
P.O. Box 790310
Virgin, Utah 84779**

April 20, 2005

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

**Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS**

Christine Kearl, Associate Superintendent

**Brett Moulding, Director
Curriculum and Instruction**

**Georgia Loutensock, Accreditation Specialist
Curriculum and Instruction**

Salt Lake City, Utah

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword.....	ii
Utah State Board of Education	iii
Liahona Academy Administration and Staff	1
Liahona Academy Mission Statement and Belief Statements	2
Members of the Visiting Team	3
Visiting Team Report.....	4
Chapter 1: School Profile.....	4
Chapter 2: The Self-Study Process	5
Chapter 3: Instructional and Organizational Effectiveness	6
Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals	6
Curriculum Development.....	7
Quality Instructional Design	7
Quality Assessment Systems	8
Leadership for School Improvement	8
Community Building	8
Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning.....	9
Chapter 4: Northwest Association of Accredited Schools (NAAS) Standards I-XI	9
Chapter 5: School Improvement Efforts – Action Plan	11
Chapter 6: Major Commendations and Recommendations of the Visiting Team	12

FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 20, 2005, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Liahona Academy is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the visiting team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Brad Christensen is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Liahona Academy, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Liahona Academy.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

UTAH STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

250 East 500 South
P. O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200

District 1

Teresa L. Theurer
66 Canterbury Circle
Logan, UT 84321
Phone: (435) 753-0740

District 6

Tim Beagley
3974 South 3550 West
West Valley City, UT 84119
Phone: (801) 969-6454

District 11

Bill Colbert
14862 S Coalville Way
Draper, UT 84020
Phone: (801) 572-1608

District 2

Greg W. Haws
5841 West 4600 South
Hooper, UT 84315
Phone: (801) 985-7980

District 7

John C. Pingree
1389 Harvard Avenue
Salt Lake City, UT 84105
Phone: (801) 582-5635

District 12

Mark Cluff
645 West Hubbard Cir
Alpine, UT 84004
Phone: (801) 756-7623

District 3

Edward Dalton
1323 Bryan Road
Erda, UT 84074
Phone: (435) 882-4498

District 8

Janet A. Cannon
5256 Holladay Blvd.
Salt Lake City, UT 84117
Phone: (801) 272-3516

District 13

Thomas Gregory
1056 West 1150 South
Provo, UT 84601
Phone: (801) 607-4702

District 4

Richard Sadler
875 Edgewood Dr.
Ogden, UT 84403
Phone: (801) 479-7988

District 9

Gary C. Swensen
1101 Framewood Ln
Taylorsville, UT 84123
Phone: (801) 281-8746

District 14

Dixie Allen
218 West 5250 North
Vernal, UT 84078
Phone: (435) 789-0534

District 5

Kim R. Burningham
932 Canyon Crest Drive
Bountiful, UT 84010
Phone: (801) 292-9261

District 10

Laurel Brown
5311 So. Lucky Clover Ln
Murray, UT 84123
Phone: (801) 261-4221

District 15

Debra G. Roberts
Box 1780
Beaver, UT 84713
Phone: (435) 438-5843

Bonnie Jean Beesley*

1492 East Kristianna Cir.
Salt Lake City, UT 84103
Phone: (801) 359-0295

Sara V. Sinclair*

1340 North 1500 East
Logan, UT 84341-2851
Phone: (435) 754-0216

Patti Harrington

Executive Officer

Twila B. Affleck

Secretary

LIAHONA ACADEMY

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

School Administration

Brad Christensen..... Principal
Clay Ah Quin Jr. Owner/Director
Joe Ah Quin Owner/Director

Counseling

Kevin Simmons..... School Counselor
Brent Price, Ph.D., LCSW Behavior Therapist

Support Staff

Sue Reynolds Receptionist/ Registrar
Harold Hinton Librarian

Faculty

David Brown
Jack Eves
David Green
Harold Hinton
Phillip Moore
David Wilson
Madalon Wilson

Teachers' Assistants
Lisa Anderson
Mark Palmer
True Lynn Parker

LIAHONA ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Liahona Academy is to provide students with the opportunity to obtain the skills needed to be personally, academically, and socially successful.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- A safe, caring, and positive learning environment is essential to student success
- All students can learn and students are ultimately responsible for their own learning
- Communicating ideas effectively is imperative for current and future success
- Higher level thinking skills are necessary to become literate in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and mathematic reasoning
- Life-long learning is an integral part of all education

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ralph P. Vander Heide, Ph.D., Consultant in School Accreditation,
Visiting Team Chairperson

Judith H. Vander Heide, Consultant in School Accreditation

Bo Iverson, Education Director, Diamond Ranch Academy

VISITING TEAM REPORT

LIAHONA ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Liahona Academy was established in the summer of 2001. It is a residential treatment facility serving boys ages 12 to 18. The boys who attend the school have alcohol, drug, anger, and relationship issues they are trying to resolve. None of the boys is court adjudicated.

The first campus was located in Leeds, Utah, and housed a maximum of six boys. Originally one teacher saw to all of the academic needs of the students. He worked at the school two to three days per week for two hours each day. From 2002 through 2003 the students worked on packets from the Brigham Young University Independent Study Program for middle and high school students. In 2003, Liahona was granted candidate status by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools and the Utah State Office of Education.

The school grew, and a science and mathematics teacher was hired so that a teacher was present at Liahona every day. Following the granting of “candidate” status the school began to evaluate the program and to write a school improvement plan.

In 2004 the owners built a 36-bed facility in Virgin, Utah. There have been approximately 25 boys in the program for the past several months. Several staff members have been added, including a special education teacher, a counselor, a librarian, and several teachers’ aids. There are no plans for expanding beyond the school’s present size.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

This young school made significant findings about each student, since each is carefully profiled in order to individualize instruction to the extent possible and to help students with their psychological and behavioral issues. The Visiting Team notes that Liahona adequately portrays the school population, environment, curriculum, and other relevant information about the school, with emphasis on its mission, philosophy, and educational and rehabilitative direction for each student.

The school’s analysis of the profile includes the identification of its strengths and limitations and, for the most part, it provides a description of the “big picture” about the performance of the school. Profile information was used in drafting the school’s improvement plan.

The Visiting Team notes that in preparing the profile, the school followed the guidelines of the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) and the NSSE handbook, *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance*, as well as the Utah accreditation handbook, *Collaborating for Student Achievement*.

The school's self-study states, "As part of Liahona's on-going school improvement plan, the mission and DRSLs (Desired Results of Student Learning) continue to be revised." This is due to the profiling procedure.

- b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

The Visiting Team commends the profile information that is given, but nevertheless recommends that in future self-studies more information on teachers be listed, such as years employed in teaching, degrees, etc. Also, it was observed that several positive things the school is doing were not listed in the profile, including the policy of the principal to meet every three weeks with "the boys" to check on their progress and to strengthen the concept of "family."

The school is reminded to put its best foot forward and to profile thoroughly.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The school has done this well, within the school. "School community" (with the exception of some excellent community service work) does not exist outside the school, although parents are involved to the extent possible and students perform community service projects.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

This has been described in Chapter 1, above.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Liahona Academy's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

Effective Communication:

- Be able to listen effectively
- Present ideas effectively through written methods
- Present ideas effectively through oral methods
- Be able to understand and comprehend the written word

Thinking Skills:

- Be able to reason mathematically
- Recognize problems, devise and implement solutions, evaluate effectiveness

Social Skills:

- Be self-motivated
- Able to collaborate with others to complete a task or solve a problem

Academic Achievement:

- Completes assigned work
- Is working at appropriate academic level
- Has the opportunity to meet individual graduation or post-secondary needs

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

Liahona is to be commended for its collaborative effort. Focus groups were established and committee members met regularly as part of the self-study process. Beliefs, mission, and DRSLs were a result of the collaborative approach. The mission statement describes a compelling purpose and direction for the school.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

This has been well accomplished (see the list of beliefs at the beginning of this report). The school beliefs address key issues pertinent to effective decision making and policy development. It appears that the implications of the school's

belief statements and the level of the school's conviction to act upon the beliefs have been considered prior to finalizing the list of beliefs.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

They align, as recommended by NSSE. The Visiting Team observed that the analysis of student learning needs takes into account the profile data and related assessment and evaluation measures of student learning. The expectations for student learning reflect meaningful and appropriately challenging goals. They are free of jargon, and the clear and concise language can be understood by all stakeholders.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The curriculum is based on the Utah Core, and teachers work together to meet and modify the core as needed for the school's unique population. The Utah Life Skills are a part of the curriculum.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

See above. All faculty members concur in focusing on the school-wide DRSLs as part of their teaching assignment.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

Teachers have learned that they must be creative and innovative with this student population; they have also learned to help with the rehabilitation of students as well as their academic needs. The Visiting Team encourages the teaching staff to continue and improve this endeavor.

- b) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

The students engage in several appropriate “additional opportunities” such as sports and community service, as well as activities that directly support the curriculum. The school provides opportunities for students to improve and enrich their learning through expanded use of time, facilities, and instructional resources.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

The development of assessments of student learning is based on a clear definition of the type of achievement to be assessed and the performance standards for evaluating the quality of students’ achievement. Assessment is both formative and summative. It appeared to the Visiting Team that assessments are fair and equitable. Teachers attempt to individualize assessment.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The “Consulting Principal” is a competent educational leader who understands the importance of promoting and fostering quality instruction. Although he does not visit the school every day, he makes regularly scheduled appearances and is frequently in telephone contact with the faculty and owners. He encourages decision-making that is data-driven, research-based, and individualized. Along with the owners, he provides skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. He constantly monitors the progress of students through periodic personal interviews with them, and by monitoring the work of the teachers.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

As noted elsewhere in this report, this is well accomplished within the school.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

The “school community” is, for the most part, the school itself.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

This is done as need is perceived and funds allow.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

The school is committed to progressive change. Of course, a principle concern is to help these youngsters with their personnel problems in order that they may better achieve academically.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Standard I – Educational Program

Liahona meets all four sections of this standard. The educational program is aligned with the mission statement and beliefs. The Visiting Team observed that the vision for the school has been collaboratively developed. The school's instructional and organizational practices, as well as its policies and procedures, support the desired results for student learning and prepare students to succeed in a culturally diverse, democratic society. The program of studies meets the requirements of the state. The Utah Core Curriculum is modified as needed for the student population.

Standard II – Student Personnel Services

All three sections of this standard are met. Personnel services are designed to give appropriate, systematic assistance to students as called for in the subsections of the requirements. The assigned personnel for guidance includes a minimum of one full-time person for each 400 students enrolled. The primary objective of the counseling program is to promote and enhance the academic and personal development of students, meet their rehabilitative needs, and prepare them for post-high school experiences or to return to a "home school" or other treatment program.

Standard III – School Plant and Equipment

This standard is met. The school plant provides for a variety of instructional activities and programs, and incorporates aesthetic features that contribute to a positive educational atmosphere. It provides for the health and safety of students and all school faculty and personnel. The Visiting Team is most impressed by the new purpose-built facility.

Standard IV – Library Media Program

Liahona partially meets the five sections of this standard. It is, of course, important to keep in mind the newness of the school and its small number of students. The school library media program is a primary resource for literacy, information, and curriculum support. The school has over 600 volumes—including approximately 200 nonfiction and reference books—and an electronic encyclopedia. The library contributes to the achievement of the DSRLs. Students also use the library in Hurricane. Effort is made to find “high interest, low level” books that are Newbery Winners or books that are considered to be “classics.”

A certified library media teacher is consulted to help the school better meet this standard. He supervises a media aide and a student aide.

Funds are provided each year to build the library. The Visiting Team recommends that these funds be increased to the extent possible.

Standard V – Records

This standard is met. Student records are maintained, handled, and protected in the best interest of students and parents. Students and parents have the right to access personal student records and are ensured the privacy of such, as guaranteed by federal legislation.

Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)

The five sections of this standard are met. The school improvement plan focuses on the total school rather than each of the separate components within the school. Systematic analysis of data regarding the performance of students has been incorporated into the comprehensive school improvement process, as has ongoing examination of instructional practices. The plan is updated and adjusted each year in alignment with perceived needs.

Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel

This standard is met. All professional personnel are in compliance with the licensing requirements of the state of Utah, and are endorsed or properly, temporarily exempted for the subjects they are teaching.

Standard VIII – Administration

This standard is met. The administration of Liahona Academy provides educational leadership, supervises and coordinates programs, and carries out the necessary and required administrative procedures.

Standard IX – Teacher Load

This standard is met. The total number of students instructed by any one teacher in any one grading period does not exceed numbers set by the Utah State Office of Education and/or NAAS.

Standard X – Activities

This standard is met. Liahona Academy supports a range of activities that supplement and augment the basic instructional program by providing additional enriching experiences for students consistent with the school's mission and beliefs. Attention is paid to providing equal opportunities.

Standard XI – Business Practices

This standard is met. The school is financially responsible. Proper budgetary procedures and generally accepted accounting principles are followed for all school funds. The school's advertising and promotional literature are completely truthful and ethical.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

It appears to be adequate and understood by all stakeholders. There is school-wide commitment to the action plan, and follow-up procedures are sound. The Visiting Team believes that the plan will achieve the desired results. School personnel intend to change and modify it as needed. Future action plans should indicate the person(s) responsible for overseeing different sections of the plan (who does what, when, and why, materials and funds needed, etc.). Also, the way in which the action plan directly aligns with the DRSLs should be better clarified. The NSSE handbook should be consulted as a model for formatting and for an excellent explanation of "alignment."

For example, the goal “increase communication with parents,” albeit an excellent goal, does not directly align with any of the DRSLs. Perhaps the school could write two action plans, one directly treating the DRSLs and another that deals with other pertinent issues.

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends the owners and principal for their enthusiasm and apparent devotion to improving the lives of the students (i.e., for their commitment to the mission statement and beliefs).
- The Visiting Team commends all personnel at Liahona for developing the “family concept.”
- The Visiting Team commends the principal, owners, therapists, and program director for holding weekly management meetings to discuss all aspects of the ongoing program of the school.
- The Visiting Team commends the principal for meeting with each student every three weeks.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for their effort to design IEPs for the students.
- The Visiting Team commends school personnel for providing opportunities in service learning.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for their honesty and willingness to improve.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for fostering a nurturing but goal-directed atmosphere.
- The Visiting Team commends the owners for having constructed the attractive yet practical new facility.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school profile in future self-studies offer even more information and data, including follow-up studies on students who have completed their stay at Liahona.
- The Visiting Team recommends that all personnel continue to work as a team on all aspects of the program.
- The Visiting Team recommends that owners and administrators make a great effort to increase the involvement of parents in school improvement. (The Visiting Team recognizes that this is difficult.)
- The Visiting Team recommends that owners and administrators consider increasing the salaries of teachers in order to ensure that quality teachers will stay at the school.
- The Visiting Team recommends that teachers, with the cooperation of the owners and administration, make better use of technology (computers, the Internet, etc.). The Visiting Team notes that school personnel recognize this need.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the staff eliminate from future self-studies much of the material that does not pertain to the six divisions of the study (mission, beliefs, etc.). Reference is made here to items such as the Six Traits of Writing and the rather detailed Measurement Level System. Such information should be made available to the Visiting Team at the time of the visit, however.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the owners increase funding for library/media needs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that school personnel in future self-studies better align the action plan directly with the school's DRSLs (using language and descriptions that make this alignment clearer).

The school is reminded that accreditation provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the school. A primary purpose of accreditation is to protect the public trust. Accreditation promotes voluntary self-regulation. It is a means of showing confidence in a school's performance (i.e., that both quantitative and qualitative standards have been established). An ultimate objective of the self-study and accreditation process should be that schools institutionalize the process of reflective inquiry and thereby become internally responsible for the maintenance of standards—even the creation of standards. The Visiting Team anticipates that Liahona Academy will continue the process of self-evaluation and ongoing improvement.